Temporal Discourse Patterns in Old High German

The Perfect

Fabian Fleissner
The use of past tenses in German is notoriously vague.

(Lindgren 1957)
The German past tenses

(ABRAHAM / CONRADIE 2001, LINDGREN 1957, ZEMAN 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfect</th>
<th>Preterite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spoken language</td>
<td>Written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogues</td>
<td>Narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>Decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Der oberdeutsche „Präteritumschwund“ (~1900)

The Upper German „Preterite Decay“

Er tat

He did

Er hat getan

He has done

© Projekt „Morphosyntaktische Auswertungen von Wenkersätzen“. Universität Marburg
Tense changing?

- Inventory of (past) tenses is stable
- Frequency of different verb forms is constantly changing

≠ changing of morphological forms
= changing of use
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old High German</th>
<th>Middle High German</th>
<th>New High German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wesan</td>
<td>sîn</td>
<td>sein (to be)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haben</td>
<td>haben / hân</td>
<td>haben (to have)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Past Participle

„Perfect“

(Perfect, Analytic Preterite, Resultative, Passive, ...)

Early New High German (1350–1650)

• Competition between the Perfect and the Preterite
• Increase of Perfect instances (50 %+)
• Decline of Preterite instances
• Random distribution across different discourse patterns

(ABRAHAM / CONRADIE 2001, LINDGREN 1957, ZEMAN 2010)
## Discourse Patterns
(deictic relationships)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story line</td>
<td>Dialogic passages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal reference modified</td>
<td>Temporal reference intact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further from the speaker</td>
<td>Closer to the speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origo excluded</td>
<td>Origo included</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early New High German (1350–1650)

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(ABRAHAM / CONRADIE 2001, LINDGREN 1957, ZEMAN 2010)
Middle High German (~1200)

(Zeman 2010, 7–8)
A matter of aspect?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect +</th>
<th>Aspect -</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tense switching</td>
<td>One past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deictic</td>
<td>Anaphoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal viewpoint</td>
<td>External viewpoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old French | Middle High German

Middle High German (~1200)

Narrative Non-narrative

Perfects (n=507)

(Zeman 2010, 7–8)
Otfrid of Weissenburg
Evangelienharmonie / Gospel harmony

- ~ 80,000 words
- Completed between 868 and 871
- Genuine Old High German (South Rhine Franconian)
- Archaic Language
Old High German (~870)

- Narrative
- Non-narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfects</th>
<th>(n=170)</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Discourse Patterns (Subsets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narration</td>
<td>Indirect Speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Speech</td>
<td>Personal Discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deictic Center
Old High German (~870)

Perfects (n=170)

- Narration
- Indirect Speech
- Personal Discourse
- Direct Speech
Old High German (~870)

![Bar Chart](image)

- Narration: 100%
- Indirect Speech: 100%
- Personal Discourse: 85%
- Direct Speech: 70%

**Categories:**
- Perfects
- Others
Inflected Participles

• „Láz sia“, quad ther méistar, „duan thiú wérk thiú si bigán; ni múaz si, sih **bigrában** bin.“ (O 4-02-31/32)
  „Let her“, the master said, „do the work she has begun; she can’t do it anymore, once I am **burried**.“

• „Ther líchamo ist ju fúler (bi thiú zélvuh thir iz ér), ist fíardon dag **bigrábaner**.“ (O 3-24-83/84)
  a. „The body is now rotten (I tell you the truth), [it] is **burried** for four days.“
  b. „The body is now rotten (I tell you the truth), [it] is a **burried one** for four days.“
Inflected Participles

![Bar chart showing the percentage of inflected participles in different discourse types: Narration, Indirect Speech, Personal Discourse, Direct Speech. The chart indicates that Personal Discourse has the highest percentage (n=20).](image-url)
Review

• Perfect increase
  a. Quantitative phase (OHG → MHG)
  b. Qualitative phase (Präteritumschwund)

• Discourse and grammaticalisation
  a. Innovative and conservative tenses
  b. Innovative and conservative morphological forms
References

- Carroll, Mary / Stutterheim, Christiane von / Klein, Wolfgang (2003): Two ways of construing complex temporal structures. – In: Lenz, Friedrich (Hg.). S. 97–133.
- MacLeod, Morgan (2011): The perfect in Old English and Old Saxon: The Synchronic and Diachronic Correspondence of Form and Meaning. Dissertation at St. James College.
In terms of the tense [in embedded clauses], I would only like to mention that the time of the events is usually determined by the speaker’s view, yet there are numerous exceptions.

(Behaghel 1897: 302)
To a certain degree, the tense in the embedded clause depends on the tense of the verb in the matrix clause, but not always.

(Erdmann 1874: 24)
Tense changing?

• Inventory of (past) tenses is stable
• Frequency of different verb forms is constantly changing

≠ changing of morphological forms
• = changing of use
Why is this interesting?

- Inventory of tenses is stable
- Frequency of different verb forms is constantly changing
- Old High German > Middle High German
  - Gi-prefixed preterites: 5.1% > 1.4%
  - Periphrastic forms: 2.5% > 8.4%

(Oubouzar 1974: 12–25)
Discourse contexts

• Direct Speech
• Personal Discourse / Exposition
• Narrative / Indirect Speech
  (Zeman 2010 / McLeod 2012)
Context I: Direct speech

- Utterance of another speaker is reported directly
- Temporal reference and deictic properties are intact
- Sharply delineated and easy to identify (speech verb, separate quotation, ...)


Example I

• Siu [...] quað that siu uuâri mid suhtiun bifangen: ‘bedrogan habbiad sie dernea uuihti. [...]’ (Heliand XXXVI.109.2986)

‘She said that she was seized by sickness: “She has suffered from evil beings.”’
Context II: Personal Discourse and Exposition

- The author directly addresses another party within the main text
- Utterances addressed by the author to his audience in general
Example II

• *Ni uuarð sið noh êr giâmarlîcara forgang iungaro manno[...].* (Heliand IX.734.32)

‘Never since has there yet occurred such a slaughter of wretched young people.’
Context III: Narrative and Indirect Speech

- utterances shifted to match the temporal reference of the surrounding narrative
- past events sharing the same temporal framework
Example III

- *Thea uuîson man [...] quâdun that sea ti im habdin giuuendit hugi [...]. (Heliand VIII.31.687)*

‘The wise men said that they had turned their thoughts towards Him.’
Data

• Balanced and representative sample of the works in each language

• “Take what you can get”
Data

- Old High German: Evangelienharmonie
- Old Saxon: Heliand
- 12,000 Verses
Context II
(Personal Discours)

Context III
(Narrative)
Work step 1

• Basic analysis

• Distribution of tenses to different Discourse Patterns
Work step 2

- Detailed analysis

- Additional variables (mood, syntactic level, conservative / innovative forms, ...)

universität wien
Clausal constituents

• Is there any relation between discourse context, tense and syntactic position of the verb?

• New answers to old questions ...